

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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OF THE  
WAVES

NO. 21

DOROTHY R. MIDGLEY

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Oral History Program

The History of the WAVES

Interviewee: Dorothy R. Midgley  
Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak  
Subject: The History of the WAVES  
Date: February 7, 1995

C: This is the first Oral History interview with Dorothy Midgley who served in the WAVES as a Recreation Specialist in World War II. Today's date is February 7, 1995, and I'm conducting the interview at her home in Riverside, Rhode Island.

Dot, I am very pleased that you have consented to share your memories of the WAVES with us this afternoon, and I'd like to begin the interview by asking you a few questions about your life before the WAVES.

Can you tell me when and where you were born?

D: I was born December 30, 1924, in a very small town in the Adirondacks, Wells, New York, population 500.

C: What did your father do for a living there?

D: He was County Clerk when he passed away.

C: And what did your mother do?

D: She was a home maker and we also had a tourist home so we were busy, busy from late spring until Labor Day with tourists and boarders. Most of our boarders came from Buffalo, New York City, Schenectady and Albany.

C: Why were they boarding in Wells, New York?

D: Because it was a recreation community. We were right on a lake and they would come and spend two weeks vacation and receive three meals a day and they could go walking through the woods. We had canoes and boats and everything like that for the people. And to get out of the city to a little country town, they enjoyed it very much. The same people would seem to come back every year.

C: What kind of work did you have to do in connection with running the tourist home?

D: Oh, my goodness. I had to change the linens and help with the laundry and wait on tables and every night, we didn't have pasteurized milk in those days, I would have a two quart and a one quart milk pail and I would take my bicycle down to the farm house and when the milk came in from the farm have the containers filled up for the amount of milk we would need for the next day. My mother made cottage cheese from the milk.

C: So you were very busy. Did you have to do any washing and ironing?

D: Oh, yes. My mother had a mangle and many days we would have days and days of rain and nothing could dry on the lines and there were no dryers in those days. We had a washing machine that the cloths would go into one tub and you would turn the ringer and then it would go in another to rinse them to get them clean. I remember once my thumb went through the ringer of the washing machine.

C: So you worked very hard?

D: I feel as though we did in the summer. In the winter it was a breeze, and then, of course, I skied in the winter.

C: You were right in the mountains, of course, and that is what you would do. Where did you go to elementary school and high school?

D: In Wells, New York. We had eight grades and four years of high school. There were about 180 in the whole school.

C: So that was rather small. Did you have any sisters or brothers?

D: I have one sister ten years older.

C: Did your family have any Navy connections?

D: No, no Navy connection at all.

C: When did you graduate from Wells High School?

D: In June of 1942.

C: So the war had started already?

D: Oh, yes.

C: What did you decide to do after you graduated?

D: Well, I think because of the inferiority complexes of a small town and many other things I absolutely refused to go to college. My sister and my mother wanted me to go, but I just felt as though I wasn't smart enough to keep up with the city children, so I ended up going to a private girls secretarial school in Albany for three years, so I was a secretary.

C: You prepared to be a secretary then? So you must have graduated from that school in 1943?

D: May or early June of 1943.

C: Did you go to work after that in the New York area?

D: Yes, in Albany I worked about three months for an insurance company. I decided that wasn't for me so I went to Schenectady and I was in the USO there.

C: Can you tell us about that, the USO?

D: Well, that was a building that they had downtown and that's where the sailors and army boys would come back and we would have music and dance and talk. You've never heard of the USO?

C: Oh yes, I've heard of the USO.

D: So that was in Schenectady. I was a hostess there.

C: Oh you were, that's fantastic.

D: One of the hostesses there.

C: Did you volunteer to do this?

D: Oh, yes, so I must of been 18, 19 years old then, and I was a private secretary for a priest in Schenectady. He was a priest, and after the service he was a Monsignor, when he went back.

C: Where did you and why did you decide to be a hostess at the USO? Do you know what motivated you?

D: I had to have something to do evenings. I mean if you're a secretary all day, and in Schenectady I didn't know that many people, and Schenectady was about 60 miles from my home so it was to have something to do.

C: You must have lived in Schenectady?

D: Yes. I had a room in a rooming house and then after an apartment with girls that I had met.

C: Oh, that's great. At the USO did you greet people? Was that it and dance?

D: And have cokes and socialize. The boys that were home on leave, it was during the war, so they were either on leave or stationed in that area.

C: There was a base around there then?



D: Well, there was the Army depot. That was a supply base. Also, the Navy supply depot in Scotia, but, still, they had to have Navy personnel there, also.

C: I had wondered who had come through Schenectady?

D: There were very, very few boys around at that time. They were all in the military. But for those who did come, a few girls were there to dance with them and socialize.

C: Well that's very, very interesting. How did you hear about the WAVES?

D: I have no idea. I have no idea, but when I did hear about it I said that is what I wanted to do. I'm sure that I was seventeen when I had made up my mind that I wanted to go into the Navy.

C: You were seventeen?

D: Yes and you had to be twenty with your parents' consent to go in, so I waited three years to join the Navy.

C: What was your reaction to Pearl Harbor? You must have been about seventeen then?

D: Yes.

C: That was December 7, 1941.

D: We were at war, but it didn't affect me a great deal. But then my school friends all started leaving. As soon as we graduated, they went into the service, the boys.

C: In what year did you enlist in the WAVES?

D: Well, I enlisted December 30, or around there in 1944, because I went into boot camp on March 8, 1945. I went to Hunter in the Bronx.

C: What did your parents think of your desire to join the WAVES?

D: My father passed away when I was fourteen. My mother said whatever I wanted to do, it was alright with her. She knew that I waited three years to go in and that's what I wanted, so she signed the papers willingly.

C: That's good. Where did you enlist? What city did you have to go to to enlist?

D: I probably enlisted in Schenectady, I assume. But I remember going to New York City to take the written test and it was around

the Wall Street area and the tall buildings, and the whole day I just wondered if it was the biggest mistake I've ever made in my life.

C: Did you take the train down by yourself from Schenectady to New York?

D: Yes, my mother rode on the train from Schenectady to Albany which was about sixteen miles, and then from there to Poughkeepsie because that's half way to New York. I cried all by myself. But by the time I got to Grand Central Station I had composed myself. I had a big suitcase and the signs to follow to get to the Bronx.

C: So you were doing this all by yourself?

D: When I had gotten off in the subway it was a nice sunny warm day in March. School children were just getting out and I guess they knew where I was going. And they said, "You'll be sorry!!" And I was at the bottom of the pit to begin with and then to have the school children say that. But anyway, and then going through the first chow line and all dressed up in my best dress. Oh, you won't have that pretty dress on much longer. It was quite a day, the first day.

C: They were kind of taunting you. Was there any publicity in the local papers about your joining?

D: Oh, yes, the daughter of Mrs. W.D. Ronald had joined the WAVES and is on her way to Hunter College in the Bronx.

C: Did you have any parties before you left? Any send off?

D: Not really. Maybe two or three girls might have gone out for dinner or something like that, but nothing big.

C: Well, you arrived in the Bronx at Hunter College and this was March 1945, correct? The war is going to be over pretty soon. How long were you at Hunter College?

D: I think until June. I don't remember exactly. It seems to me I don't remember if boot-camp was six weeks or eight weeks. And then I stayed four weeks longer for specialist school right at Hunter College.

C: Where did you live during this training and indoctrination period?

D: Right at Hunter College and other girls lived in what they called cubicles which were like apartments. But when I went in, we were at Gillette Hall. It was a big, big room and I can

remember there were about twenty-four bunks so there were about forty-eight of us in one room. That was most unusual. I would say that my group was the only one that lived at Gillette Hall. I haven't heard of anybody else, but all the others lived in apartments, like eight in the apartment.

C: So that was really communal living? Did you find that difficult to get used to?

D: Yes, I remember there was a Negro girl.

C: Was there any feeling of prejudice or discrimination against this person?

D: Oh, no. The only person that I had a problem with was--I had the bottom bunk and the girl over me, her name was Opal Biddle and she was from Mississippi, and she was sick. She was on the top bunk-sick. So, finally, maybe the next night, we switched or something, but anyway she didn't last in boot. They discovered that she was pregnant. I'll never forget her throwing up in the bunk and seeing the pail down there. That was kind of a bad experience for boot camp. But that made me survive and I lived through it.

C: Did you meet any friends that were lasting at the boot-camp?

D: No, I didn't. They were all friends at the time and we were all going to hear from each other, but I don't have any friends from boot camp.

C: Now, when you were at boot camp, what was your daily routine?

D: My mind isn't too clear about that, but I am sure we were up early in the morning and we had to get dressed. We were issued two pairs of shoes, strictly school teacher shoes, that had low heels and one with a little heel, and we had to lace them up and we had to wear cotton stockings, of all things, even though there were nylons in those days. Cotton stockings and the shoes, but it had to be because we marched so much and we were on our feet so much that we had to have comfortable shoes and cotton stockings.

C: Did you like wearing the uniforms?

D: Yes, I didn't mind at all. One thing in boot camp that I do remember, you know, is we're really brainwashed at boot camp, you know, you have to salute and you salute anybody who has a brass button. I was at the point that when we did have the liberty of going to the movie, if there was a bellhop with a brass button, I was saluting, naive, from the country. I was even saluting the bellhops. You're just salute happy and if you saw a chief with a bit of brass on the hat and it was different, I mean, you just

automatically saluted a chief. At least, I did. Maybe I was too soft. I don't know, but I was brainwashed. I know that.

C: You were well trained and indoctrinated there. Well, during the day you obviously attended classes.

D: Yes, and I can remember falling asleep in the classes, too. Sitting there and your head nodding and then you would wake up, and I'm sure I missed half of what went on in some of those classes.

C: They were just general indoctrination classes, weren't they?

D: Yes, but we had to learn about ships, different things about ships, the starboard side and the keel and all that, which I know nothing about that right now. But we had to learn quite a bit about the Navy.

C: And the Navy ways, I guess?

D: Oh, yes.

C: Did you march to class in formation from Gillette Hall?

D: Oh I'm sure that we did, but most of the classes were held right in that area. We didn't have to march very far.

C: Did you find the classes challenging?

D: Not really for me. I mean I was there because I had to be there, but I wouldn't have been there otherwise.

C: Did you have tests to take?

D: Yes, we must have. Because I found out whether I was in the top third, middle third or lower third. So I'm sure that we did have tests to take I must have passed them alright.

C: Did you ever meet Captain Amsden, who was head of Hunter College boot camp? He's from Jamestown.

D: Oh, is he really? I never met him.

C: Would you say you had any trouble adjusting to military life and the discipline of military life?

D: No, it was just that I was very, very homesick at the very beginning, and my mother and sister were living in the Catskills at the time. It was only about 50 cents for a phone call so I called home every night where they were living. It wasn't home, but I did call home just about every night. But other than that I finally adjusted.



C: Yes, it takes time. Did you have any time off during basic training? Any liberty? Any weekends off?

D: Towards the end we must of had a weekend or two because we, I'm sure that we went into New York City, and I can remember going to USOs there and meeting lots of sailors there and they were in uniform, no stripes, but were in uniform.

C: Did you have compulsory chapel?

D: I'm sure that we did.

C: Because you have a little flyer in your scrapbook from the chapel there.

D: I'm sure that we did. I don't remember, but I'm sure that we did.

C: Where did you study during this time frame, if you were in a hall with all those girls?

D: But that is just where we slept. They must have had recreation rooms otherwise during the evening. I remember the telephones were off in another adjoining the room that we were all in, in the evening.

C: How did you find the food?

D: I never did complain that much. It's like going to a hospital now. I don't complain about the food.

C: I just wonder because some people said it was quite different than eating on the plates.

D: Oh, the tin trays, oh yes, but you adjust.

C: Well, you finished your basic training in a couple of months and then you said you stayed on for another month at the Bronx because you were being trained in your specialty. Did you select a specialty or were you tested to see what that you were well suited for?

D: I must have been tested because when you received your orders and you were either sent to link trainers school or storekeepers school or what ever. So I was selected for Specialist S School.

C: And what is Specialist S School?

D: Welfare and Recreation. For the sailors if you had a S on your patch it would be shore patrol, so everybody thought I was with shore patrol. But it wasn't.

C: It was Welfare and Rec. Now what kind of training did you have to have for that extra month at Hunter for Welfare and Rec?

D: I really don't know. Maybe it was because I was athletically inclined to begin with, perhaps. I don't know how they happened to pick me because when I was little I grew up on skis and then living right on the lake with swimming and boating. Then coming from the small school we only had school activities; we had no movies; we had no bowling; we had nothing in this small town, except skating, ice skating, winter sports, and basketball, and plays, and civic activities. So why I was chosen I don't know.

C: You were doing those kind of things. What kind of training did you receive during this month? Do you remember?

D: I really don't remember a thing. I must have gone to classes and everything; I don't really remember back then.

C: Well, after you finished this extra month, where were you assigned as Welfare and Rec Specialist?

D: My first assignment was Parris Island at the Marine training base. But I had to stop in Charleston on the way before going on to Paris Island.

C: How did you get down to Charleston?

D: I took the train.

C: Alone or with a group?

D: All alone. I was all alone checking in at Charleston. Worried to death that they would have a Court Martial if you didn't get there on time. You had to be right there and everything had to be just so.

C: Where did you check in at Charleston?

D: At the Navy base. At the main gate. And then they probably had orders there to tell me where to go, but I do think that they took one look at me when I got there and they thought I was so green no way could they ever send me to Parris Island. So they kept me at Charleston, and I think they sent another girl on to Parris Island.

C: So that was done almost immediately?

D: I would assume so. I don't know who was in charge there; I'm sure that I wasn't ready to go to Parris Island.

C: That's kind of rough and tough. I would think so. So you were assigned to the Charleston Naval Base. What exactly did you do there? This must have been what time frame?

D: June of 1945. I had barracks duty, stand watches, eight hour watches, and they could have been eight to four, four to twelve, whatever.

C: For what barracks?

D: Noisette Creek barracks. There were about 100 girls in the barracks. We had two levels, upstairs and downstairs.

C: What kind of buildings were they?

D: Long wooden buildings and we had a cubicle. There were maybe two bunks in each cubicle where there would be four girls. There might have been just a few with six girls, three bunks in a cubicle. The officer in charge of the barracks had her own quarters down stairs near the entrance. Then we had a nice large recreation room with sewing machines and, of course, we had records in those days, records and radios, no television, nothing like that.

C: Did you have a mess hall there?

D: Yes, we did. We had a mess hall, also with tin trays. There was silverware and the cooks in the galley. We had a couple of ping-pong tables in the mess hall, also.

C: So your job as a Welfare and Rec Specialist consisted of standing watch in the barracks for eight hours?

D: Yes, and also we had a little building in back of the barracks called Wave Haven, with five living rooms and a kitchen.

C: What was that used for?

D: For entertaining, because we were never allowed to have any sailors or any men in the barracks at all. If we had dates, we could go to this building in the back, Wave Haven. It was one of my duties there, also, to keep those rooms clean and the officers would come every Friday with their white gloves and go along the top of the doors and the top of the windows to see if there was any dust. I do believe that is why I am not a good housekeeper today because I did my share. Also, shortly after I was there, the war was over, the ships came sailing back. They had been out at sea many, many months and there was a lot of money in recreation funds because they had no place to spend any money. Many of the ships had big ship parties. Some of them would rent a hall in Charleston, maybe for a month. We could go there; they had juke boxes and beer and soda. Others would throw big ship parties in the beautiful mansions along the battery in Charleston and we would walk up the winding stairway to the second floor to the ballroom and there would be a large table just covered with shrimp. They would have orchestras, so

sometimes the ships would spend all of their money in just one evening. It was one of my duties to try to get the girls interested to go to all of these affairs.

C: Was it difficult getting them interested?

D: Some of them. If you had two or three or four in a row they didn't feel like going out every single night. Some were the partying type and some weren't. So you still had to keep their interest up. I would arrange for transportation to come to take the girls to wherever the parties were going to be.

C: That sounds like more Welfare and Rec than standing watch in the barracks.

D: I had duty at the pool. I really wasn't a lifeguard, but I did have duty at the pool. I can remember going to Charleston with another girl one day and I saw this bathing suit. I think it was in Lerner's in the window. It was so nice. It was navy blue and it had little white flowers on it. So I bought it. I went to the pool; you had to take a shower before you went to the pool. The dye in that bathing suit never stopped running. I stayed in the shower, I swear, for ten minutes and the dye kept running out of that bathing suit. It was just terrible. That was an experience. It was kind of funny, but it wasn't funny at the time. When I was supposed to be out there and all this blue

is still running out of the suit. So it was a very inexpensive suit, I'm sure.

C: So you had duty at the pool then, and they had that for recreation for the WAVES?

D: We had softball games.

C: Did you organize those?

D: No, I really didn't work in the softball. My name was on a list to go to Parris Island to play once, but I didn't go. So I never did see Parris Island.

C: That's a little bit off the coast, I think.

D: Just south of Charleston.

C: Did you have any trouble adjusting to the heat of Charleston, because you were there in the summer time?

D: No, but it was very warm at times and many of us were sick at different times and they called it cat fever.

C: Why?



D: I don't know what it was, whether it was just cat fever that we had. Then there was some kind of a pill that they gave everybody, APC, I'm not sure of the initials, but everybody got them. It seems to me that it was APCS. It would be like an aspirin, but then we would be well again in a day or two.

C: You didn't have any air conditioning then?

D: We had no fans. No fans in the barracks or anything to keep it cool.

C: So you suffered with the heat?

D: But you get used to it.

C: Did you make any lasting friendships during this time-frame, when you lived at Noisette Creek?

D: Yes, many good friends. I still hear from them. In fact, there is one, we weren't too close at the time, but we're close now. Mrs. Matelin was nearby in Connecticut. Then, a friend outside of Charleston now, who has been here a few times and friends in California. Most of my friends are in the South, in the Carolinas.

C: Some of them stayed there then?

D: Yes, and some of them were from that area to begin with.

C: Now what were all those 100 women who were at Noisette Creek doing? What were these WAVES assigned to? Were they all different specialties?

D: Yes. Of course, we had the cooks in the galley crew and I had a special friend from Virginia. She was in, I'm assuming, in fact, she ended up being a chief in IBM I think, IBM and computers were perhaps just starting at that time. I wasn't into that. They had the yeomen and they had the pharmacist mates and storekeepers and that's all I can think of right now.

C: So there was a whole mix of specialties?

D: Oh yes, everything of course. They didn't have gunners or link trainers or anything like that. At the navy base, they were mostly secretarial fields and computers. IBM, I'm assuming was into computers at that time. I don't know programming and things like that.

C: How large was the Charleston Navy Base? In size and population?

D: I really don't know, but I know the ships did come sailing in after VJ Day. I can remember going to Charleston on VJ Day;

going into Charleston that night and everybody was just walking in the streets and the lights were on. Everybody was just having a happy time.

C: It was a great celebration.

D: Yes. Then after, it was really great to see the ships coming in and how happy the sailors were to be back in port, knowing that they would soon be discharged. Some stayed in and made it a career, then others got out as soon as they could. My tour of duty was the duration of the war plus six months. Those were the terms when I went in. It wasn't like for four years or six years; it was the duration plus six months.

C: Oh, I see. Do you remember how many hours you had to work per day when you were in Charleston as a Welfare and Rec Specialist? Did you have an eight hour day?

D: Really, as far as the barracks went, it was eight hours.

C: Did you have to work on weekends?

D: Yes. We had three shifts every day for the specialists in my category and we all had to stand watch, to see that the girls signed in and signed out and to make sure that everything was alright in the barracks.

C: Could you go out in the evenings after your eight hour shift?

D: Yes, you could do whatever you wanted to do, if you weren't on duty.

C: What time did you have to sign in, come back in to the barracks? Ten? Eleven?

D: No, as I remember there was no particular time that we had to be back in the barracks. It was eleven or twelve.

C: So no curfews of a sort?

D: No. The only curfew that I ever knew of is when another girl and I decided to take a hop to Florida. We went out to the Air Force Base in North Charleston and we got a hop on a converted, I think, B-24 and we were the only two girls on this flight going down to Homestead, Florida. It was in the evening and you could see light out between the sides of the airplane. We landed in Homestead and had never been there before. The mosquitos were so bad, I had never seen them that bad. Then we had to get a ride into Miami. We got into Miami and there was shore patrol out "What are you doing out at this hour, there's a curfew in Miami." I think it was nine o'clock and this was about eleven o'clock that we were getting into Miami. So, anyway, somebody must have been watching over us. They got us to WAVE barracks there and

there was room for us to stay in the hotel at the WAVES barracks in Miami that night. We had no idea that there was a curfew then.

C: Were you down there for a weekend?

D: We were able to hop down and hop back. We were lucky.

C: You were. Do you remember what you did there? Did you just go to the beach?

D: I don't remember. We probably went down on a Friday night. I don't remember whether we came back on Saturday or when. I just don't remember. Maybe we went to Burdines or went shopping. I just don't remember what we did. It was a girl that I didn't know very well. I had just met her and she had said, "let's go," so I said, "okay."

C: Seeing the world. Join the Navy. See the world. You had the opportunity to because of the air base there. Well, getting back to Charleston, how did you feel about the city? Did you like the city of Charleston?

D: Yes, it was a beautiful city, but the Navy was not particularly welcomed in Charleston. They said that some of the

old timers, and I can understand why when you have a big navy yard, but with their economy at the time, they would have sailors and dogs not allowed.

C: So they weren't welcomed with open arms.

D: I think it was about the same in Norfolk, also. Speaking of Norfolk, we had always heard about the cattle trains going out of Norfolk. If you wanted to go any place, you would take a cattle train. When I was going home on leave once I got a hop north from Charleston and in those days you could get bumped from the train. So I was bumped in Norfolk, which wasn't too far from Charleston. Some officer needed a priority or maybe someone was ill in the family, I don't know. So, anyway, there I was all alone in Norfolk and it was beginning to get dark and I had to find my way to the entrance to the base and then I was going to find my way to this cattle train I had always heard about. So then I heard someone say that they were loading a taxi for Washington. So I investigated. There was a taxi driver and his wife and me and three sailors in the back seat. It was something like ten dollars or something like that. I thought that was better than taking the cattle train. When I got to Union Station in Washington, I was able to get the train to New York in order to get home. When my mother heard about that she said, "Imagine taking a taxi with those sailors and people you didn't even know." I said, "Well, things have worked out alright mother."

C: What an experience.

D: She was appalled to think that I would do that, but I did it.

C: So you did have one leave in Charleston?

D: Yes. Then another leave. Two very close friends, one from Virginia and one from Pennsylvania, we went to Cuba; we went to Havana.

C: Tell us about that. That sounds very interesting.

D: This was in May of 1946. Of course the war was over and you could travel. It was before Castro. Batista was in power then. So we made our reservations and I guess we flew to Miami. I remember we flew from Miami to Havana and we had reservations at the Nationale and it was "THE" hotel at the time; it was gorgeous. Even then, as I remember it, it was 25 cents for a cup of coffee. It was quite expensive. But they had the pool and it was very, very nice. We could take a taxi into Havana for dinner, and I remember we took a tour. We hired a taxi for a day. I think it cost each of us two dollars for the whole day. He took us out to the countryside and he stopped at this little farm where we saw a cock fight which we had never seen before, which was probably illegal at the time. We saw the roosters fighting which wasn't too pleasant. In Havana, we went down to

the cathedral in the square and I remember there was an alligator factory there. Of course we went in there. We bought alligator shoes and a alligator purse to match. We thought we were the "cats pajamas" with those alligator shoes and alligator purses that matched and everything. We did a little shopping there. After that we flew back to Miami and stayed a couple of days.

C: Did you meet anybody interesting in Havana?

D: Yes, we did. I think there might have been five older men from Canada, Montreal and Quebec, and they were in Havana to promote goodwill and foreign trade. So they took us out for dinner and we might have had a few drinks together and that was about the extent of that, but we did meet them.

C: I remember the pictures in the album showing that.

D: They had so many rum distilleries in Havana. We just made tours of all the rum distilleries. I remember they had banana rum and it was so good. So we brought a couple of bottles back with us to the barracks. It was the most sickening rum we had ever had. When we got back to the barracks, it was just terrible.

C: Well, you said you stopped in Miami for a couple of days?



D: We must have gone to the beach there. We didn't do much shopping because we were still in uniforms. So there was nothing to buy. We weren't looking for clothes or anything like that. We traveled in uniform. We went to Morro Castle and, of course, we saw the monument in Havana harbor I guess that was it. They had a pool at the hotel. So we had a nice time.

C: Well, that sounds like another nice excursion during your WAVES experience. Getting back to Noisette Barracks a little bit, you mentioned something about conditions there, regarding insects and the like. Can you elaborate on that? Your living conditions?

D: The little building we had out in back, the recreation building, had five living rooms. Of course, it was kept very clean and we didn't keep much food out there or anything. But in fact, I don't remember any food that was kept out there. But we would turn the light on in the kitchen and the cockroaches would run off the tables, run off the counters, everything, as soon as the light went on they were out of sight. So out of sight you could sit and enjoy yourself but I could remember those cockroaches. Then we were near the water, the Noisette Creek; the barracks was near the water. It must have been on the Cooper River in Charleston, and we had ships way out. We couldn't see them, but they were out in back of our barracks and we had these, I don't know what you call them, big river rats or what, but they

were not nice. They were huge. They were big rats and they would even run over the bunks at night.

C: When you were sleeping?

D: Well, I guess. I don't know, but I can remember girls, I mean it got to be funny with all of these rats. After you see them coming off and the girls would be jumping up on their bunks and there's a rat and he probably would leave and go out and that would be it. Even in the galley, I assume, they had exterminators there. But it still didn't solve the problem. They had this machine in the galley where we ate and it would circle, go around, and it had a little hum to it. It would attract the rats and at night they would have it on and the rats would go in and be electrocuted in the machine and then it would just roll them on out so I was never there in the morning to see them when the girls went to work in the morning to prepare breakfast. The rats would be there so I don't know how effective it was, but I heard them tell that they got two or three that night or something like that. It's something you just live with.

C: Yes, I guess so, but so unpleasant to live under those conditions.

D: I don't remember ever seeing a rat in a cubicle that I was in, but I knew that they were there, especially on the first floor.

C: Were there any discipline problems with any of the WAVES that you know about in Charleston?

D: No, not really. I was disciplined once.

C: For what?

D: Well, I was the kind of girl that always did everything right. I did what I was supposed to do and was quiet and all that bit. I had the duty that day from eight to four and this other girl who was supposed to relieve me at four, she was from Mississippi, a real nice girl. She was going out on a ship or something and didn't know what time she would be getting back. She asked if I would stand by for her, you know, and I said sure. Her last name was Haley. I said, "Sure Haley, I'll be glad to." A few days before that a special friend and I had been to Charleston and it was nearing the time when we were going to be discharged. We had seen some material that we had really liked so we decided to go to Charleston to buy the material. It was a quiet afternoon so I left the post about ten minutes early and so we were walking down, I'd say it was about a mile and a half to the gate, so we were walking down the road and our commanding officer drove by in the pickup truck which was assigned to the barracks. I said, "Oh, oh." Here I left ten minutes early. I said there is nothing I can do about it now so I went on. We got back about seven o'clock from town and the first thing I heard

was, "Boy, Dot, you're really in trouble, really in trouble." I said, "Why? I know I left about ten minutes early." She said, "Yes, but Haley didn't come back and you had promised that you would standby for her." I honestly forgot all about it. It absolutely did not enter my mind. I honestly forgot. So the next morning, and the officers name was Ms. Huff, and she really fit the name. So both Haley and I were called in before her big desk and everything. So she said, "Well, what happened?" So I spoke up and I said, "Well, as you know, I left early about ten minutes." And I said, "I promised Haley that I would standby for her if she didn't get back. So I told Ms. Huff that I had promised Haley that I would be glad to standby for her if she was late getting back. I said I completely forgot it, and I would take the whole blame for everything. So I think the fact that I admitted that I was wrong and spoke the truth, which was the truth, I had about three hours extra duty. We were planning an outdoor party or something like that, so it wasn't hard duty to work outside or something, so she was good to me. I mean I could have been disciplined much more. So I think really that was the worst thing I ever did in the service.

C: Well, that's not very bad.

D: No, but it was bad at the time. I mean you just don't leave your post until you are relieved, and I felt so sorry because I had promised her that I would standby for her and I didn't do it.

I completely forgot. It was more important to go to Charleston and buy material, you know, more than anything else at that time.

C: Was this Ms. Huff very strict?

D: Yes, nobody liked her. She had a poker face. In fact, she was a great friend of Senator Strom Thurmond and one of the other girls on duty one night thought that she saw his shoes. She had her room right off, but there was a dutch door. It was open at the bottom and the top. Well, there was a pair of mens' shoes underneath and I think the other girl did pursue it, but I wasn't in on it. I don't know anything about it. They would have made a good pair anyway.

C: Were you aware of any other discipline problems with anyone else in your barracks at that time?

D: No, not really. I can't think of any problems.

C: Did any Black women serve in your barracks? You mentioned there was a Black women in Hunter.

D: No. I don't remember a Black girl in our barracks. I do remember once, coming on leave from Charleston maybe, it was the time I was in Union Station in Washington, coming out of the ladies room a Black person came out and I turned around and I

looked at her and even though I had only been in Charleston for a few months it must of been instilled in me that the Blacks went to the back of the bus. They had their own water fountains and everything and I just didn't realize it. When I was in Washington, just above the Mason Dixon Line, the fact that a Negro lady came into the restroom, I had to look twice and then I remembered, oh yes, I'm in the North now.

C: Did you find that troublesome at all, the segregation of the South?

D: No, not really. Because we were on the base and if we took the bus to Charleston, I mean we were on the bus, and they were in the back and so we had no reason to associate with the natives of Charleston.

C: Right. You were kept away from the natives. Did you have a lively social life yourself when you were in Charleston?

D: Not dating seriously or anything like that. Whenever we did date, there were usually two of us together. I never did go out on single dates. You know there was usually two couples.

C: Where did you go?

D: Into Charleston proper. There was an NCO club, that's a Non-Commissioned Officers Club. They had orchestras there and dancing and sailors came and WAVES came; we had just good times. Of course there were all the ships parties and everything. There was no problem with a social life.

C: Yes, it was very, very full. Did you stay in Charleston for the six months after the war?

D: Yes, I did, because we were given an option you could increase your rate by one stripe if you signed over for three more months, so I did. I stayed an extra three months, so as a result I came out second class. I would have been third class, being in just a little over a year as it was. I was in just about eighteen months and came out second class. So I got my second class strictly by signing over for three extra months.

C: Do you remember what your pay rate was at all?

D: No. I really don't remember. I think it was fifty dollars when we went into boot camp. It couldn't be much over seventy dollars, I don't think.

C: Did you save your money or did you spend it?

D: I must have saved some money. I don't remember really, but I always had enough money; I wasn't hurting.

C: One dollar went much further in those days. Prices were so much lower. When were you discharged from the Navy?

D: August 14, 1946, which was a year to date from VJ Day.

C: How did you feel about leaving?

D: Well, a little bit sad and then a little bit glad to be going back to civilian life. Then my special friend Pearl from Christenburg, Virginia, we were very good friends, so we decided to take the bus north from Charleston. Our first stop was Richmond, Virginia. We stopped at Richmond, checked in at the hotel. Of course we were still in uniform and they just happened to be having an American Legion convention at that hotel. So we were invited to the American Legion ball that night and we were treated royally and had a very good time in Richmond and then from there we went on to Washington, DC and that was when we started to do a little shopping. We had no civilian clothes at all to wear. I can remember buying the shoes, the dresses and things like that. Then we went on to New York City. We did more shopping there. Then Pearl went back to her home in Christenburg, Virginia, and then I came back to Schenectady.



C: The New York area. Did you have to muster out at any special place or were you discharged in Charleston?

D: It was in Charleston at the receiving station and probably the personnel office.

C: Did you ever have a chance to meet or see Mildred MacAfee during this time-frame?

D: No, I never did. Not in Charleston.

C: Now you do have a picture, though, of Franklin D. Roosevelt's funeral. I believe it was the WAVES commemoration of his funeral.

D: No. I was in boot-camp at Hunter on April 13, 1945, when we received word that Franklin D. Roosevelt passed away. The next morning we had services and it was out in the big field with the flag pole and we all circled around it. I can remember that service for him.

C: Did you ever have a chance to see or to meet Eleanor Roosevelt. Did she ever visit your WAVES barracks?

D: No.

C: She didn't.

D: We were out in the boonies in Charleston.

C: Did you feel that the WAVES was a smoothly run organization?

D: Yes, I did.

C: Did you feel that it provided you with any opportunities that you wouldn't have had in civilian life?

D: Oh yes, a great many. Getting along with people and meeting people, going different places. The grass is greener on the other side, you know. Meeting all types of people. I remember one girl, seeing her makeup was so perfect, and she put her lipstick on with a brush, you know, at the time. I would just sit there and look at her. I had never seen anything like that before. Then one girl might be very, very religious and go the church three nights a week and then we had the other girls who were more like I was. You could meet any type of friends that you wanted to and you could pal around with any type of person that you wanted to pal around with. My philosophy about the service was, in those days in civilian life, even after you got out, the reputation that we had that anybody who went into the service was either from a broken home or they had a sheltered life or they were no good, but that was not true because I met

some of the greatest people, and I always said, you are in the service what you are in civilian life. So if you're going to fool around in civilian life, you will in the service. But I mean the quality of the girls was top notch and I think a lot of it was because you had to be twenty to go in and it's a big difference from going in when your sixteen or eighteen; the fact that you could have been working for a couple of years and you had to want to go in. We weren't drafted. So I met some very, very fine people.

C: That you still keep in contact with?

D: Even the WAVES National Organization that we have here in Rhode Island now, we seem to all have something in common. Because it took a lot of courage to go into the service. It took a lot of courage to leave home and go. So we all have something in common, and we all have our own stories to tell, and it was just a very good experience.

C: Did the WAVES experience change or redirect your life in any way after you left?

D: No, not really, except that the person that I worked for before I went into the service I went back to work for after, so basically my life was the same after as it was before.

C: Did you feel that the WAVES experience was more exciting than civilian life?

D: Yes, definitely, because in civilian life back in '45 and early '46, I mean there were no boys around at all and if they were around they were called 4F. They were unsuited for the service and, of course, some of them could have had a leg missing or something like that and be perfectly alright, but you always felt that there was something a little bit wrong with them that they weren't in the service. So there really was no social life as far as dating. Very little dating. Even when I was in school in Albany we were supposed to invite a gentleman friend and there was nobody to invite.

C: No, they were all in the service. Did you find small town life rather stifling after being in the WAVES and traveling and meeting people?

D: No, because Schenectady was not a small town, maybe 100,000 thousand people in those days. Television was just coming out then in '45. It was city life for me. I grew up in the country where there was no bowling or anything at all. Schenectady had everything, Albany had everything, and, of course, in the winter I went skiing about every weekend. Then I would go home. My mother was living up in the country yet on weekends. Then I joined the Reserves in Albany.

C: When did you join the Reserves?

D: It must of been either late '45 or '46. So it must have been in '46 or '47 maybe. They just organized the Womens Reserve unit. I don't remember for sure. Then I stayed in. I know I was in during 1948 and 1949.

C: So you were in for four years after the war? Or three years after the war?

D: Maybe three years or two and a half. I really never did keep track of my Reserve time.

C: Did you have to drill every month?

D: We went to Reserve meetings first at the Navy Supply Depot in Scotia, which is a suburb of Schenectady. Then I don't know whether they closed that or what, but then we went to Albany for the Reserve meetings. It must have been once a month. Then I remember Pearl, my special friend from Virginia, came to Schenectady and she worked at General Electric. When you are in the Reserves you have to spend two weeks active duty a year. So we went to Lloyd Bennett Air Field in New York City for the two weeks, I remember, one summer. That's the only time I went away, so maybe it was only two years that I was in the Reserves. I don't know for sure.

C: But you maintained your navy connection. How did you happen to join the Reserves? Do you remember?

D: I must have heard about the Reserve unit and then I met friends in the Reserves that are still very good friends. One has passed away. I have one good friend in Schenectady who was in the Reserves.

C: Do you remember why you left the Reserves?

D: I got married and moved to North Carolina.

C: Did you marry somebody who was in the war or in the Navy?

D: Yes, I met him in Charleston. That was back in '45 and '46 but we weren't married until five years after. We had both been discharged for five years. He was from western North Carolina so we got married in 1951.

C: So you must have kept in contact during that time-frame?

D: Oh yes, with him. Then, too, he was called back into the Korean conflict and stationed in Birmingham, Alabama. So I moved to Birmingham and my oldest son was born at Craig Air Force Base, which was about 100 miles away in Selma, Alabama, maybe about 100 miles from Birmingham, and that was the closest service base

available for me to go when my oldest son was born. Then my youngest son was born in Ashville, North Carolina.

C: Up in the mountains. That's very interesting. So what kind of work, or did you work at all, when you were in North Carolina? Did you remain as a housewife or did you pursue any type of outside work?

D: Well, my husband at the time, ex-husband now, his family on his mother's side had property on Mount Mitchell, which is the highest peak east of the Mississippi, and at one time my ex-mother-in-law's father owned the top of Mount Mitchell. He owned about 6,000 acres. So, anyway, over the years the state condemned the property at the top of the mountain to make a state park. The property adjoining the state park was owned by my husband's family. There were five brothers and sisters and they divided the property and drew straws to see who would get what. Then we had our property and a souvenir and sandwich business on Mount Mitchell which adjoined the state park at the time for a couple of years.

C: Well, to get back to your involvement with the WAVES when you finally came back to Rhode Island. You're a member of the Ocean State WAVES now. Are you an officer in the organization?

D: No. When we first organized I was vice-president, but I didn't want to run for office again. I work on the newsletter with the editor; we are co-editors. Any other way I can help the organization out; I make a new roster every year of all the members and their telephone numbers and everything and kind of keep track of things in general.

C: And attend the meetings?

D: Oh, yes, every meeting.

C: You must be a member of WAVES National then as well?

D: Oh, you have to be a member of WAVES National in order to belong to the units.

C: Have you gone to any of the conferences or conventions?

D: Well, back in the '40s I went to two conventions in New York City. One was at the Waldorf Astoria, I think, and, then, in 1949, maybe '48 or '49, they had a convention in Boston, so I had a brand new 1948 Chevy at the time. It was really something to have a car in those days. Because you couldn't buy an automobile in the late '40s; you had to know someone to get an automobile. I must have been in the Reserves then because the five of us drove from Schenectady to Boston for the reunion and we had a



good time. And then I went to Washington, I think, in '89; that was the last one that I went to.

C: Well, these early conventions or reunions in New York and Boston must have been organized by, I assume, by some of the former WAVES?

D: Yes. Well, before WAVES National it was WAVES Corporation or something like that. I believe the name was changed. They must have had a committee at the time to get this organized.

C: Were they large conventions? Did lots of people go in the late 40s?

D: I have one of 3,200 or there about, so they were quite large. And then at that time they were still close to our friends and in touch with them, so maybe five or six or ten of us would get together for these reunions.

C: And close to the experience; the war was four or five years over so it was very close.

D: Not even five years.

C: Well, that's very interesting. I hadn't heard about these post WWII late '40s conferences before.

D: In fact, I have a program someplace from the two different ones that I went to.

C: Do you march in any of the WAVES parades?

D: I was in one a year ago last fall at North Kingstown. But I'm beginning to huff and puff. I can't do it anymore.

C: It's a little hard marching that long. You seem to be a very enthusiastic WAVE and you have collected a lot of information about your service and WWII in your scrapbooks, with your photographs which you have let me copy. Do you have any other comments on your service experience or connections?

D: Not really, except that I finally retired working for the state of Rhode Island after 10 years. I worked for private industry for 20 years with no pension from two different companies, one for baking powder, the old time companies, so, finally, I went to work for the state and retired from the Registry of Motor Vehicles and, as you know, Rhode Island is very, very license plate conscious and when the veterans plates came out I had the opportunity to get a plate with a good number, but I didn't care anything about getting a good license plate number. So now that I'm retired I thought well, why not, because some of my friends have veterans plates and we're very proud of women veterans. So anyway, I have ended up writing a letter to

Governor Sundlun. I have just claimed 58 for a veterans plate, and I think that is quite a good number. So Governor Sundlun must have liked me and then, too, before his wife Marjorie had her tragic accident, she was a speaker at the Veterans Hospital, with which I have been active, also.

C: In Bristol?

D: No, in Providence Hospital in Hayes Park, the Veterans Hospital. So anyway, his wife Marjorie was a speaker at one of the gatherings and she was the next speaker and it was shortly after that she had her accident. So whether because I mentioned that in the letter or not I don't know, but I am pleased that Governor Sundlun gave me the honor of having just a two digit number. Because I don't think there is any other woman veteran in Rhode Island who has a two digit number.

C: That's interesting.

D: You might have a W 25 or an M 32 or something like that but just to have two numbers and no letter, I'm quite pleased to have it.

C: Oh, that's great.

D: Very pleased to have it.

C: That is quite an honor. And I thank you very much for cooperating with us in our Oral History Program and granting me this interview on your experience in the WAVES in World War II.

D: And thank you. I've enjoyed it.

C: Oh good, I've enjoyed it too. Thank You.